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Message Text

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ACTION ABF-01

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----------016979 301126Z /12
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8520
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY ROME

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USEEC

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TO BEN READ FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: EEC, AGAO
SUBJECT: EXPANDED ROLE OF GAO AND GAO VISITS TO SELECTED POSTS

REF: STATE 207030

1. I AM PLEASED TO HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO FOLLOW UP ON THE LONDON CHIEFS OF MISSION MEETING DISCUSSION OF GAO ACTIVITIES. MY OVERALL IMPRESSION IS THAT THE EXPANSION OF GAO ACTIVITIES ABROAD RAISES SOME SERIOUS QUESTIONS IN TERMS OF POST RESOURCES, HOST GOVERNMENT SENSITIVITIES, AND GENERAL COST EFFECTIVENESS. I UNDERSTAND THE GAO IS TRYING TO IMPROVE THEIR OPERATIONS TO TAKE ACCOUNT OF
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THESE CONCERNS AND I APPLAUD THIS EFFORT. AS A GENERAL RECOMMENDATION, HOWEVER, I WOULD FAVOR FEWER VISITS, MORE CARE IN THE CHOICE OF SUBJECTS FOR STUDY, AND GREATER EFFORT IN THE PREPARATION AND FOLLOW-UP OF THESE VISITS. A MORE DETAILED RESPONSE TO THE QUESTIONS RAISED REFTEL FOLLOWS.

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A. FREQUENCY:

DURING THE PERIOD UNDER CONSIDERATION, JULY 1976 - JULY 1978, THE MISSION HANDLED TEN SEPARATE VISITS FROM GAO TEAMS. THESE VISITS WERE CONCERNED WITH ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES, PESTICIDES, NON-FUEL MATERIALS, TRADE ADJUSTMENT ASSISTANCE, GRAIN MARKETING, INTERNATIONAL ENERGY POLICY, PETROLEUM STOCKPILING, ENERGY RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT, ANTI-DUMPING PROCEDURES, AND THE DEBT SITUATION IN CEMA COUNTRIES. THE ANNUAL FREQUENCY OF THE VISITS WAS DIVIDED EQUALLY OVER THE 1976-1978 PERIOD, BUT THEY TENDED TO BE BUNCHED IN THE SPRING AND SUMMER MONTHS AND IN TWO INSTANCES VISITS WERE OVERLAPPING. THE AVERAGE LENGTH OF THE VISITS WAS ABOUT THREE AND A HALF DAYS. THE DURATION OF TWO VISITS WAS GREATER THAN ONE WEEK. IN THE VIEW OF THE MISSION SUCH LENGTHY VISITS ARE NOT DESIRABLE BUT MAY SOMETIMES BE NECESSARY BECAUSE OF THE NEED FOR PRIOR FAMILIARIZATION WITH SUBJECT MATTER OR DIFFICULTIES IN ARRANGING VISITS WITH KEY EC OFFICIALS. MOST OF THE GAO TEAMS HAVE BEEN SMALL (TWO OR THREE MEMBERS), AND THE MISSION HAS ENCOURAGED GAO TO SEND SMALL TEAMS. GAO FRANKFURT HAS BEEN RESPONSIVE TO MISSION OBJECTIONS TO PROPOSED LARGE TEAMS.

THE EFFICIENCY OF THE VISITS WOULD BE IMPROVED IF THE GAO WERE TO COLLECT BASIC DOCUMENTS AND INFORMATION NOT

ONLY ON THE SUBSTANCE OF THE ISSUE BUT ALSO ON THE EC INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT BEFORE COMING TO BRUSSELS. GAO COULD THEN GIVE CLEAR GUIDANCE TO MISSION STAFF REGARDING THE TOPICS TO BE DISCUSSED AND OFFICIALS TO BE CONTACTED. THE SUGGESTIONS MADE REFTEL REGARDING ADVANCE QUESTIONNAIRES AND PURPOSE OF VISIT STATEMENTS ARE HELPFUL. CARE SHOULD BE TAKEN, HOWEVER, THAT ANY QUESTIONNAIRES USED WITH LOCAL OFFICIALS BE OBJECTIVE AND NOT LONGER THAN NECESSARY; THEREFORE PROVISIONS SHOULD BE MADE FOR DISCUSSIONS WITH USEC BEFORE FINAL SUBMISSION. MISSION ALSO RECOMMENDS THAT GREATER EFFORT BE TAKEN TO INFORM POSTS OF THE RESULTS OF EACH GAO INQUIRY AND THAT FINAL REPORTS BE SENT ROUTINELY TO POSTS INVOLVED. WE HAVE TAKEN NOTE OF NEWLY ESTABLISHED COMPTROLLER GENERAL PROCEDURES AND GAO EFFORTS MENTIONED PARA 2 OF REFTEL REGARDING INFORMATION ON GAO PLANS AND UPCOMING VISITS AND ON POST-VISIT REPORTING. WE WELCOME THESE IDEAS BUT ARE OBLIGED TO NOTE THAT SO FAR WE HAVE NOT SEEN THEM AT WORK.

B. DEMANDS ON POST'S RESOURCES:

THESE VISITS HAVE REQUIRED CONSIDERABLE SUPPORT FROM

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MISSION RESOURCES, INCLUDING MAKING HOTEL RESERVATIONS, ARRANGING TRANSPORTATION, BRIEFING THE TEAM IN ADVANCE OF APPOINTMENTS WITH EC OFFICIALS, MAKING INTRODUCTIONS AND ACCOMPANYING THE TEAM ON THEIR OFFICIAL CALLS. MISSION SECRETARIES ARE ALSO CALLED UPON TO ASSIST IN MAKING TELEPHONE CALLS, TAKING MESSAGES AND PROVIDING OTHER SECRETARIAL SERVICES. BECAUSE OF GROWING EC SENSITIVITIES TO GAO VISITS REFERRED TO BELOW, MISSION OFFICERS HAVE SPENT MORE TIME ON SUCH VISITS THAN MIGHT

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OTHERWISE BE THE CASE, AND THIS HAS INCREASED THE STRAIN ON OUR RESOURCES. OVERTIME PAYMENTS TO STATE PERSONNEL HAVE NOT BEEN INVOLVED.

C. REACTIONS OF EC OFFICIALS TO GAO VISITS:

THE REACTIONS OF EC OFFICIALS TO GAO VISITS HAVE BEEN MIXED. IN A FEW CASES THESE OFFICIALS WERE PLEASED TO SPEND TIME ANSWERING GAO QUESTIONS, ESPECIALLY WHEN THE GAO TEAM COULD ALSO ANSWER QUESTIONS BY EC OFFICIALS ABOUT US POLICY. IN MOST CASES, HOWEVER, COMMISSION OFFICIALS

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HAVE BEEN PUZZLED OR DISMAYED BY THE RATHER UNSOPHISTICATED APPROACH TO THE SUBJECT MATTER DISPLAYED BY GAO INVESTIGATORS. WHILE THE TEAMS OFTEN REQUEST TO SPEAK
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WITH "COMMISSION EXPERTS", THEY ARE USUALLY UNABLE TO DO SO EFFECTIVELY BECAUSE OF THEIR OWN LACK OF DEPTH IN THE SOMETIMES HIGHLY TECHNICAL AREAS BEING EXPLORED. OFTEN THE TEAMS' REQUESTS FOR DOCUMENTATION HAVE BEEN PUT FORWARD IN FISHING EXPEDITION MANNER. ON ONE VISIT THE USE OF A LONG AND SUBJECTIVE QUESTIONNAIRE IRKED SEVERAL COMMISSION OFFICIALS. THE MISSION HAS NOT HAD ANY PARTICULAR PROBLEM WITH OVER-AGGRESSIVENESS OR ARROGANCE ON THE PART OF THE GAO TEAMS. BUT WE HAVE RECEIVED INFORMAL COMPLAINTS FROM OFFICIALS WORKING ON THE US DESK OF THE COMMISSION OF THE BURDEN WHICH SUCH VISITS HAVE PLACED ON THEM. OTHER COMMISSION OFFICIALS LET US KNOW INFORMALLY AFTER ONE GAO VISIT THAT THEY CONSIDERED IT AN IMPOSITION AND A WASTE OF TIME. MISSION IMPRESSION IS THAT COMMISSION OFFICIALS HAVE SIMPLY POLITELY REFRAINED FROM COMMENT AT OTHER TIMES. MOREOVER, THERE HAS BEEN AN INCREASING TENDENCY IN THE COMMISSION TO VIEW SUCH VISITS AS AN EXERCISE IN EXTRATERRITORIALITY, ESPECIALLY WHEN SOME SUBJECTS CLOSELY RESEMBLE TRADE INVESTIGATIONS UNDERWAY IN THE US.
2. FOR THE FOREGOING REASONS THE MISSION RECOMMENDS THAT MORE CARE BE EXERCISED AS REGARDS CHOICE OF SUBJECTS FOR STUDY AND THAT THE NUMBER OF VISITS BE REDUCED. OTHERWISE WE RISK MORE SERIOUS EC REACTIONS THAT COULD ENDANGER GAO/USEC RELATIONS WITH THE COMMUNITY.

3. USEC REALIZES THAT THE GENERAL ACCOUNTING OFFICE, OPERATING UNDER A MANDATE FROM THE US CONGRESS, HAS IMPORTANT WORK TO DO. THUS, WE WILL CONTINUE TO DO OUR BEST TO ASSIST SUCH GROUPS WHEN THEY COME HERE. NEVERTHELESS, IT IS OUR IMPRESSION THAT THE SUBSTANTIVE GROUND COVERED BY THESE INVESTIGATIONS FREQUENTLY DUPLICATES MATERIAL WHICH HAS ALREADY BEEN REPORTED BY USEC AND IS
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AVAILABLE IN WASHINGTON. WE BELIEVE THAT INRMATION OF THE TYPE SOUGHT BY THE GAO COULD OFTEN BE MORE EFFECTIVELY DEVELOPED BY OUR OWN OFFICERS WHO, FIRST OF ALL, ARE KNOWN BY THE COMMISSION PEOPLE AND, SECONDLY, HAVE MORE EXTENSIVE BACKGROUND IN THE SUBJECTS BEING DISCUSSED.
4. IN CONCLUSION IT MIGHT NOT BE ENTIRELY FACETIOUS TO

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SUGGEST THAT THE GAO PREPARE A STUDY OF THE COST-BENEFIT
RATIO OF EXPANDED GAO OVERSEAS ACTIVITIES. HINTON

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